

Mindfulness training in the corporate world is increasing in popularity both in major corporations like Apple, Google, GM, LinkedIn, Ford, and HSBC as well as government organisations like NHS, military, prisons, and first response services. However, from experience when working on a pitch to deliver a mindfulness programme to a corporate business, it sometimes feels like the process is more of a token gesture towards the 'improvement of employee well-being'. Rarely, are Steph and I asked questions about how the mindfulness programme can contribute towards change in culture of the organisation. So, we have been asking ourselves – is this a fad or is there a place for long-term 'team mindfulness'?

The impact that mindfulness can have on productivity.

When we mention the word mindfulness or mindfulness practice, we tend to associate it with the individual practice, a personal choice that people make when striving to achieve a better balance in their life. Based on well-documented research over the past 50 years, we know that having a regular mindfulness practice helps to support mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and stress in general, as well as enabling measured decision-making and heightened focus. Increased resilience to day-to-day challenges and continuously changing workplace environments will all ultimately lead to increased job satisfaction.

Being realistic, we all know that an organisation or team culture always takes priority over personal values, regardless of how deep the individual mindfulness practice runs. Particularly true if the culture is toxic and unsupportive, it becomes harder to thrive. This is one of the reasons why many organisational researchers both in the UK and US are now advocating that the way forward is adopting team mindfulness. So, let's define this term and assess if there are real benefits in implementing it, how it can be done and how the success can be measured.

What exactly is team mindfulness?

Team mindfulness is less about individual members of the team having a regular practice or being dependant on individual thoughts and response patterns but applies to the group or organisation as a whole.

It is about creating a **collective ethos**, cultivating a **collective awareness** or as highlighted by [Science Daily](#) team mindfulness refers to “a shared belief within a team of focusing on the present moment and ensuring team members interact with one another with compassion, without judgement and prejudice.”

Yes, this is not rocket science and maybe would be expected behaviour in the majority of corporations, but surely team mindfulness should be more than that? Could a mindful approach act as the right ingredient to create that cultural shift so that team members, whilst collectively aware of team’s objectives, tasks, roles, and dynamics, are able to build healthy collaborations with open and positive communication, without fear of being blamed and enabling optimal productivity, use of time and resources?

One of the prime benefits of team mindfulness is conflict resolution and increased collaboration.

What is a likely outcome when a team of people with a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, working styles and skillsets are asked to perform a challenging task to a tight deadline? Experience tells us that it may lead to a conflict of opinions, beliefs, approaches and it is not always productive. Often conflict can turn personal leading to resentment, relationship conflict and social undermining. But it doesn’t have to be this way.

According to a study by the [University of British Columbia](#), a key component to team mindfulness is being committed to **paying attention to the present moment** - “excluding recall of past interactions and predictions about future situations... the team’s focus is

just on the task itself and **not on any kind of prejudgment based on past experiences**".

The researchers found that when team members in the test groups employed these principles, interpersonal conflict decreased and the teams as a whole remained focused on the task in hand. This focus on team tasks helps reduce emotional or reflexive responses, harnessing diversity and creating potential for greater achievement for the teams where previously the conflict was more likely to arise.

As more companies move towards flexible or blended (office-based/virtual) working approaches, when it comes to team and project-based tasks, the mindful approach will act as an enabler for faster integration and a way of reducing reliance on an auto-pilot approach to work.

Naturally, being mindful makes people more observant of what is happening around them both in face-to-face and the virtual world encouraging trust and driving better outcomes for the team goals.

So, does the evidence support it?

Indeed it does and it is very encouraging to see more and more studies confirming that mindfulness in any type of business will benefit all employees and productivity. For example:

- In a 2016 [study](#), Kathleen Sutcliffe, Ph.D., and a Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Business and Medicine at [Johns Hopkins University](#), found that there is a correlation between mindfulness and reductions in emotional exhaustion, along with an increase in job satisfaction.
- [In a 2018 study](#), Lingtao Yu, Ph.D., a professor of Organizational Behaviour at the [UBC Sauder School of Business](#), showed that the use of mindfulness techniques helps improve a team's focus, productivity, and work relationships. The researchers found that, when teams are more mindful, the degree of interpersonal conflict decreased.

- In 2020 a study at School of Management at [Shanghai University](#) concluded that team mindfulness moderates the relationship between individual mindfulness and work engagement. This conclusion may bridge the relationship between mindfulness and work engagement theory.

How do you go about implementing team mindfulness?

Implementing team-based mindfulness in the workplace could certainly be a challenge. Whilst it needs to be incorporated into corporate wellness programs, it is also important to make sure that the implementation is not dogmatic and represents one of the pathways to achieve a more coherent approach to organisational culture.

Here are some tips on adopting a soft implementation method:

- **Introduce mindfulness education sessions**, followed by 4-, 6- & 8-week programmes that are offered in the workplace to set the foundation. From our experience this can also be supported with weekly sessions to maintain momentum.
- **Set the expectations about behaviour** that will help to support the practice and introduce the concept of **mindful meetings** - shorter, focused agenda, engaged listening (no phones or side conversations), practice open and respectful communication and allow time and space for differing opinions and disagreements, without judgement.
- **Introduce “pause” moments** by offering daily intention setting, creating a positive start for the day. This might sound slightly left field but we know that positive reframing, regardless how your day may have started outside of work, can set you in the right direction and create a moment to establish all those needed human connections within the team.
- **Create a more engaging environment to unwind**, for example a meditation room, regular breaks from the computer, lunch outside, lunch together as a team, no answering emails after you have left for the day.
- Finally, and more importantly, **demonstrate [mindful leadership](#)**! This behaviour needs to come from the top as leaders set

cultural expectations within the team and whilst not every member of the team needs to have the mindfulness training, mindful leaders will influence the behaviour of others.

In essence the introduction of team mindfulness is the first step in creating mindful organisations where the culture continues to evolve and respond to external and internal changes whilst at the same time supporting mindful awareness and compassionate leadership.

To find out more about how we can help you embed mindful teams into your business get in touch - vera.dubrovina@mindfulnessuk.com and stephanie@mindfulnessuk.com.